Northwest Territories

Forging the Future

Anchored in Our Past,
Building on Our Present

Youth Conference Report

July 7-8, 2011

Prepared by:

tait | cc

Introduction

When Premier Roland spoke with young adults during the summer of 2010 about their vision for the future of the Northwest Territories (NWT), they said they wanted more opportunities to engage with leaders and provide input to NWT governments, and to be involved in decision making processes. On July 7-8, 2011 Premier Roland hosted the *Forging the Future* conference to provide that opportunity.

Conference Delegates

42 youth delegates, ages 18-25, represented all NWT regions and a variety of backgrounds. (See Appendix A for a full list of youth delegates).
Delegates participated from each of the following NWT Communities:

- Behchokǫ̀
- Dél̨ı̨ne̢
- Fort Good Hope
- Fort Simpson
- Fort Smith
- Hay River
- Inuvik
- Lutsel K'e
- Norman Wells
- Paulatuk
- Tulita
- Yellowknife

Attending Leaders

- Premier Floyd K. Roland
- Minister Robert C. McLeod – Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) and Minister Responsible for Youth
- Grand Chief Sam Gargan – Dehcho First Nations (DFN)
- Mayor Gordon Van Tighem – President of the NWT Association of Communities (NWTAC)
- Sandra Elanik – Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) – on behalf of Nellie Cournoyea

Facilitator

The conference was facilitated by Jenn Sharman, Tait Communications and Consulting Inc.

Conference Objectives

1. To wrap up the Premier's youth portion of the Northern Leaders' Forum *Forging the Future* engagement process.
2. To formally share the NLF Report: *Forging the Future – Anchored in Our Past, Building on Our Present* with invited youth.
3. To ask participating youth two questions:
   a) What are concrete proposals from youth in terms of enhancing youth participation in political discussion and decision making?
   b) What are one or two concrete recommendations from youth that would advance the priorities NWT youth submitted to government under the Premier's common vision engagement process?

Conference Outcomes

1. Connecting representative youth from the NWT with the Premier, the Minister Responsible for Youth and attending northern leaders on the NLF report through an open dialogue.
2. Identifying one or two recommendations for consideration of governments as to how youth, in concrete ways, can be more engaged at all levels of government.
3. Identifying one or two recommendations for consideration of governments in how NWT youth's priorities could be advanced.
4. The Premier will summarize the youth conference, including recommendations, at the August session of the Legislative Assembly and the facilitator's report of the conference will be posted on the Premier's website (under the *Creating Our Future Together* site).

Summary of Conference

Day 1

The conference began with an introduction of leaders, a review of the agenda, as well as a review of the purpose of the conference. Premier Floyd K. Roland made introductory remarks.

The facilitator led conference delegates through an overview of the vision contained in the report from the Northern Leaders' Forum: *Forging the Future – Anchored in Our Past, Building on Our Present*.

Vision Statement

Strong northern governments working in unity to ensure the NWT in the 21st century is a place:

- where sustainable communities share financial and human resources to create economic development opportunities that enable all residents to generate wealth and reduce poverty;
- where land, resource and self-government agreements have been successfully concluded;
- where all residents of all ages have access to education, training and employment opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential;
- where the region's wealth of renewable and non-renewable resources produce a high standard of living;
- where equitable access to social services ensures the health, safety and security of all;
- where enterprise and creativity are encouraged, hard work is rewarded and the benefits of sustainable development are universally shared;
- that preserves and promotes its environmental and cultural heritage to maintain the traditional Northern lifestyle; and,
- where differences are respected and diversity is celebrated, both within and among various groups.

The facilitator then led delegates through a review of the "wish list" that was created by youth as part of the Premier's 2010 Youth Conference. This wish list is contained in the Premier's report entitled *Creating Our Future Together*.

Wish List

- More opportunities to engage with leaders, provide input to NWT governments and be involved in decision making
- High-quality education and job training and higher graduation rates
- A Northern university
- Maintaining and improving Student Financial Assistance
- Culturally-relevant learning, including on-the-land programs and Aboriginal language immersion
- Balancing economic development with environmentally sustainable practices
- Strong environmental laws to protect the land, water and wildlife
- Green energy and a green economy
- Adoption of new and evolving technologies to keep both people and communities connected
- Better support for people with addictions and drug resistance education

Delegates discussed the vision statement and reviewed the wish list in breakout groups, considering the following questions:

- What do you think of the vision that the leaders have arrived at from their discussions with northerners? Why?
- What do you think of the wish list that came out of the Premier's meetings with youth last year?

For each item on the wish list delegates discussed the following questions:

- How important is this item to achieving the vision set out in *Forging the Future*?
- How difficult will it be to make headway in this area?
- What would the NWT (government and residents) have to do more of, less of, maintain, or do differently for this to happen?
- What are some specific and tangible first steps to make this happen?

Delegates compared the items on the wish list to the vision statement rating both their importance and difficulty to achieve. Based on the breakout group discussions, three priority areas from the wish list were clearly identified and are listed here in no particular order:

1. Education: high-quality education and job training and higher graduation rates (including culturally-relevant learning).
2. Economy and environment: Balancing economic development with environmentally sustainable practices; strong environmental laws to protect the land, water and wildlife; green energy and a green economy.
3. Addictions: better support for people with addictions and drug-resistance education.

The facilitator summarized the day's events.

Day 2

The facilitator provided an overview of the previous day's discussions, and outlined the agenda for day two. The Premier addressed the group and reflected on the first day's discussions.

Delegates then joined one of three tables, based on the three priorities identified on day one: Education; Economy and Environment; and Addictions. Groups were led through a process to identify two concrete action items related to their table's topic. A total of six concrete actions were brought forward – two from each of the priority areas. In order to further narrow the priority actions, delegates discussed and agreed on criteria against which each of the actions would be evaluated. The criteria included:

Specific: how specific is this request/action item?
Attainable: will it be difficult or easy to accomplish this action?
Urgent: how urgent is the need to address this issue?
Cost efficient: what would be the cost/benefit of accomplishing this action?
Impactful: how far-reaching would the impact on NWT residents be?
Culturally relevant: how culturally relevant is this action item?

The wish list was narrowed to six areas and delegates began to discuss specific and concrete actions they should recommend to the Premier. Later in the process, and based on criteria developed through plenary discussion, delegates identified (through a voting process) those they felt should be refined to develop and recommend as concrete actions.

1. Education: Place a qualified school counsellor/mentor in every school. The counsellor should be well versed in cultural tradition as well as modern education. They would assist with student/teacher partnerships, liaise with families and support students in finding post-secondary education options.

2. Education: Extend cultural programs and supports for teachers. Provide more resources and support to teachers (longer culture camps/culture orientation programs; housing etc) and provide training for cultural knowledge holders to become educators.
3. Environment and Economy: Conduct consultations for universal development regulations. Consult every community as well as industry to determine what NWT residents want to see in regulations governing development, with the end goal of creating universal regulations for development in the NWT.
4. Environment and Economy: Redesign the Northern Studies curriculum with a focus on local sustainability, including: eco-friendly practices; small business development; community activism; and promotion of eco-tourism within the north. The end goals of redesigning the curriculum to incorporate more local sustainability are self-sustaining communities; increased tourism; and nation-wide marketing of NWT products.
5. Addictions: Conduct consultations for regional treatment centres with the end goal of creating treatment centres with culturally sensitive and multi-cultural staff; trained professionals; unique treatment plans for youth, adults and elders; as well as recovery support programs.
6. Addictions: Conduct consultations for prevention awareness programs. Consult those with substance abuse problems to help develop and implement prevention and awareness programs for specific demographics (youth, adults and elders).

Using the agreed criteria to guide decision making, delegates were asked to select their top two priorities of the six identified. The priority actions were listed, and each participant was invited to place one checkmark beside their top two priorities. Through this process delegates ranked the priorities in the following order:

1. Conduct consultations for regional treatment centres
2. Place a qualified school counsellor/mentor in every school
3. Extend cultural programs/support for teachers
4. Redesign Northern Studies curriculum with a focus on local sustainability
5. Conduct consultations for universal development regulations
6. Conduct consultations for prevention awareness programs

Delegates were advised that all six of the priorities would be captured in the conference report and would go on record as youth priorities. The top two priorities would go forward as the priorities youth wanted the government to take action on.

Recommendation #1

Conduct consultations for regional treatment centres with the end goal of creating treatment centres with: culturally sensitive and multi-cultural staff; trained professionals; unique treatment plans for youth, adults and elders; as well as recovery support programs.

This recommendation is connected to the following component of the vision that came out of the consultations done by the Northern Leaders' Forum:

Strong northern governments working in unity to ensure the NWT in the 21st century is a place where equitable access to social services ensures the health, safety and security of all.

Conference delegates emphasized that all other aspects of the vision and wish list would be impeded without individually healthy community members. As young people, youth are exposed to addictions issues through many different avenues. NWT youth are very concerned about the increasing rates of addictions in the NWT.

Delegates expressed concern that NWT residents could not get treatment for addictions within their region (with the exception of the Nats'ejée K'éh treatment centre in Hay River). Being far away from home and family is a barrier to successful treatment. Delegates stated that people are more likely to relapse if the treatment centre is far away and if no ongoing support is provided. Delegates acknowledged that it might be challenging to have a treatment centre in every region, but were concerned that people have easily accessible treatment programs that allow them to be closer to their families and support networks.

Delegates emphasized the need to create different treatment models for youth, adults and elders because they have differing backgrounds and treatment needs. On the same note, post-treatment support also needs to be tailored to each group. Individualized treatment plans are needed so that people can find a course of action/plan that works for them. The program should be created on a strength-based model of treatment. Post-treatment support should also emphasize developing the person's strengths. Skills acquisition was mentioned as a valuable tool for prevention as well as post-treatment.

Delegates mentioned the importance of talking with people with addictions to see what kind of services and support they would like to see based on their experiences.

Recommendation #2

Place a qualified school counsellor/mentor in every school. The counsellor would be well versed in cultural traditions as well as modern education and would focus on supporting students and supporting student/teacher partnerships.

This recommendation is connected to the following component of the vision that came out of the consultations done by the Northern Leader's Forum:

Strong northern governments working in unity to ensure the NWT in the 21st century is a place where all residents of all ages have access to education, training and employment opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential.

Delegates discussed the difficulties faced by NWT students in making it to graduation. There are many schools in the NWT that do not have school counselors or mentors, and some delegates related that they never would have made it through high school or known what to pursue for post-secondary education if it weren't for the encouragement and information provided by their school counselors. The counselors need to be trained, certified and well versed in cultural traditions as well as modern education. Peer counseling training could also be offered.

Youth Engagement in Decision Making

A plenary discussion was held on the topic of youth engagement in decision making processes, with the goal of agreeing upon one concrete action item to bring forward. Discussion questions included the following:

- How can this generation continue to be involved in moving its agenda forward?
- How can young adults get more involved in future decision making?

Proposal for Youth Engagement

Delegates supported the creation of a Youth Council/Association/Society that is run by youth, for youth, that communicates regularly with leaders and government.

Vision: Youth representatives from each region would meet quarterly to discuss issues raised at the community level, with leaders sitting at the table with them, then present their ideas and suggestions to government.

- Get help and guidance from people who have experience with the issues. Learn from their wisdom.
- Until the Youth Council is set up, keep having meetings like this once a year.
- Use technologies like teleconferencing so that being away at school does not prohibit someone from participating.
- The Youth Council would be connected to community councils across the NWT.
- Several delegates indicated an interest in assisting in the creation of such a Youth Council/Association/Society

Risks:

- Group could lose momentum and people could stop attending. This initiative needs government support to keep momentum going.

Other Discussion and Recommendations

Youth and Leaders Working Together

Youth want to see more information sharing and collaboration between leaders and youth. They want more opportunities to speak directly with leaders about the issues

that matter to them. Youth want to be part of brainstorming and creating solutions to NWT challenges.

- Hold another conference like this next year. Have youth sitting at the table *with* leaders. Leaders would report back to youth on progress made on requested action items.
- Create an annual Youth Summit with youth and leaders working together.
- In order to understand youth perspectives and to show commitment to young people, leaders need to be more involved with youth. Face-to-face communication shows more emotion and details than other forms of communication. Leaders need to be interacting with student councils / youth groups.
- Hold a conference during the school year so youth can go back to their communities and schools to share the information. High school students should be participating at meetings like this one.

Education

- Youth teaching youth about their experiences and changes they have made to policies/legislation
- www.proud2bnwt.ca is already a good resource for youth
- Don't focus on "politics"– focus on one particular issue and let youth see the influence that they can have on this issue that they care about
- Northern Studies should be offered in all four years of high school. Could be a place for the youth association to connect with NWT youth
- Create a civics course so youth can learn more about NWT political processes (there is not enough of this content in the current Northern Studies curriculum).
- Youth need to be educated about how much the Legislative Assembly and political processes affect their lives
- Increase awareness that you can write to your MLA (teachers in schools could convey this message)

Communications and Art

- Create a youth magazine or 'zine like "Toxic Blend" from the Yukon
- Red Wire magazine is another example – by aboriginal youth for aboriginal youth
- The magazine could spread knowledge, awareness, and address issues that are important to youth in NWT in communities
- Northern problems, Northern perspectives
- A magazine that raises awareness and creates opportunities to contribute
- Incorporating art, music and the written word to keep young people engaged
- NWT Arts Council or NWT Writer's Guild could provide funding or support

- Art is a way to connect with people but it is difficult to get this type of movement off the ground

Barriers: lack of knowledge about how to implement this idea; adults that dismiss youth's ideas

Employment

- Expand the page program/youth parliament program
- Not enough jobs – applying for jobs is difficult. Getting a job in your field with GNWT is a challenge. Affirmative action may be an issue to finding employment in one's field. Finding jobs is also an issue for P1s. Qualified students often can't find a GNWT summer job – they feel students are hired based on personal connections. More jobs need to be made available for youth.
- Improve the system for summer employment including having more jobs in the regions
- Offer more training opportunities for youth
- Equal access for youth to participate in all sorts of opportunities: jobs, meetings, councils, etc.
- Youth need to learn how to write a resume in order to apply for a job
- Create employment centres for youth in community libraries
- There is an exit survey for GNWT summer students. Provide opportunities to provide input throughout the summer.
- Create a summer employment program where youth shadow/work with MLAs
- Share opportunities/better communication about what is available for students

Youth commitments

After discussions on what youth would like the GNWT to do for them, delegates made a number of commitments to stay engaged as young people in decision making processes:

- Vote and be involved in the political process. "We have power in our numbers if we vote"
- Keep up-to-date on current issues
- Attend sessions at the Legislative Assembly or watch it on TV
- Look into creating a 'zine for youth that engages them on the issues affecting young people in the NWT

The facilitator summarized the conference discussions and outcomes. Premier Floyd K. Roland then gave a closing address.

Appendix A:

Conference delegates

First Name	Last Name
Sara	Balanuik
Nicole	Bonnell
Jasmine	Brewster
Ronald	Bull
Shelagh	Byatt
Patrick	Chambers
Justin	Dalton
Julaine	Debogorski
Charlene	Deneyoua
Dwayne	Drescher
Twyla	Etchinelle
Christine	Glowach
Carly	Gon
Jordee	James-McQueen
Kate	Jefferson
Madison	Kaylo
Kiera	Kolson
Rebecca	Kornichuk
Lael	Kronick
Chad	Larocque
Calvin	Loman
Cara	Manuel
Shawn	McLeod
Connie	Modeste
Alyssa	Ross
Sasha	Ross
Erin	Selleck-Chocolate
Sarah	Stephen
Keelen	Simpson
Meika	Stewart
Jennifer	Thistle
Brandon	Thompson
Jerri	Thrasher
Mabel	Thrasher
Tamara	Voudrach
Aaron	Wasserman
Vanessa	Waugh
Megan	Welsh
Lorraine	Westman
Angus	Wilson
Kristen	Yakeleya
Bhreagh	Ingarfield